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**Ranking Member Howard L. Berman's Opening Statement at Hearing,
"Time to Pause the Reset: Defending U.S. Interests in the Face of Russian
Aggression"**

"While there remain significant areas of disagreement between the U.S. and Russia...there can be no doubt that the reset has led to increased cooperation between our two countries in a number of critical areas."– Congressman Howard L. Berman

Washington, DC – The following is Congressman Howard L. Berman's , Ranking Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, opening statement as prepared for delivery at today's committee hearing entitled "Time to Pause the Reset: Defending U.S. Interests in the Face of Russian Aggression."

When the Obama Administration took office in January 2009, the U.S.-Russia relationship was at one of its lowest points since the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War.

President Obama wisely decided that permitting this relationship to falter did not serve U.S. interests, and his Administration set out a new policy – branded as the "reset" – to increase engagement on a number of levels.

While there remain significant areas of disagreement between the U.S. and Russia – including Russia's record on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, its conflict with Georgia, and Moscow's arms sales to dictatorial regimes – there can be no doubt that the reset has led to increased cooperation between our two countries in a number of critical areas.

Most importantly, Russia has played a more constructive role in efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapons capability. Last year, Russia voted in favor of a UN Security Council resolution imposing new sanctions on Iran and cancelled a contract to sell Tehran the sophisticated S-300 air defense system.

In April 2010, Presidents Obama and Medvedev signed the landmark NEW START agreement, and Russia has already cut their nuclear arsenal below the 1,550 ceiling it is obligated to reach by 2018.

Some dismiss this significant achievement, saying that Moscow would have reduced their nuclear missiles to this level for economic reasons anyway. These critics neglect to mention that without New START, there would be no legal inspection, no verification and monitoring regime, as the previous one expired with START I. There would also be no limits on the numbers and types of new nuclear missiles Moscow could deploy.

President Reagan famously said, “trust, but verify”; it seems that some critics would have preferred to trust their assumptions about Russian nuclear security outlays, and to trust Russia not to build more and more newer missiles, than give President Obama credit for safeguarding U.S. nuclear security.

Russia has also supported the Northern Distribution Network – since early 2009, has served as a critical transit route through Russia and Central Asia to support U.S. military operations in Afghanistan. Almost two-thirds of the non-lethal materials we need to support our troops are now shipped on this route, and it is especially critical today given the increasing difficulty of moving goods through Pakistan.

Russia and the United States also have a mutual interest in preventing the flow of narcotics from Afghanistan, and cooperation on counternarcotics efforts have also increased as a result of the reset.

Finally, as Russia continues to negotiate its entry into the World Trade Organization, it has reopened its markets to imports of U.S-produced meat, a market that had largely been closed when President Obama took office. U.S. meat exports to Russia could total as much as \$500 million this year. This means more jobs for Americans.

Now to the part of the glass that is half empty.

Despite repeated calls by President Obama and Secretary Clinton, Russia still refuses to comply with the cease-fire agreement that ended the August 2008 conflict with Georgia. As a result, there are now more Russian troops stationed in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia than before the conflict. This is a clear violation of the agreement hammered out by French President Nicholas Sarkozy. The administration should continue to hold Russia to its commitments at the ongoing talks with Georgia in Geneva.

Russia remains one of the least free countries in Europe, and we are right to raise serious concerns about Russia’s dismal record on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The recent decision by the Russian Ministry of Justice to deny registration to the People's Freedom Party is emblematic of the obstacles faced by opponents of the government.

Yet the space for public discourse in Russia has widened to some extent in the past two years. Russia’s young, tech-savvy president has steadfastly fought efforts to restrict the Internet. And an increasing number of Russians are taking on their government with new found activism.

A significant number of Russian citizens have stepped forward to protest the destruction of a forest to build a highway between Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Regrettably, those who engage in such protests sometimes pay a very steep price. After exposing corruption by tax authorities, lawyer Sergey Magnitsky was murdered. Even if the investigation of his death ordered by President Medvedev is allowed to run its course, and the perpetrators brought to justice, it will not bring back a husband to his wife, a father to his children or a son to his parents.

Madame Chairman, focusing only on areas of disagreement with Russia creates a distorted picture of the complex U.S.-Russia relationship. But it is critical that these troubling issues not get swept under the rug.

I look forward to hearing the views of our panel on areas of both cooperation and disagreement with Russia, and their recommendations for ensuring that U.S. national security and economic interests are protected while keeping the relationship with Moscow on a more even keel no matter who occupies the White House or the Kremlin.

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